

Why put poison in your plot?

By ANN FENWICK

Rachel Carson wrote "Silent Spring" right here in Duxbury. One of the best books of any generation, she made us all aware of the consequences of pesticides and our responsibility to ask, "What are we going to do about it, we the average gardeners with our suburban plots?"

For starters, do we really need or want those poison signs greeting us on our lawns?

I remember growing up playing on fabulous lawns - thick and strong with a few sweet violets and some honey-scented white clover - where I learned about bees. (Where are your kids learning about bees?) A lawn could be a place to find a small bouquet of springtime flowers or an occasional four leaf clover if you spend a little time. It could be a poison-free place to lie and watch the clouds go by, noticing what's about to bloom and enjoying your garden.

We only added lime every spring, and now you can use a spreader to put down compost as well, and then just overseed the lawn to crowd out the annual weeds like crabgrass, so it's easy. Our soil is much sandier here on the coast, so if our lawns and gardens are going to be successful, the soil has to be enriched with compost.

Organic Compost is the original mulch – rich, dark brown and packed with nutrients, no need for extra “fertilizers.” This is what you (or your hired help) should be spreading on your trees, lawns and gardens every spring. (NOT the freshly ground “bark mulch” which offers no nutritional value, and when heaped up in such large quantities is literally suffocating to plants and trees alike.

There’s a lot of this going on, why?) If weeds are the problem, plant evergreen or perennial groundcovers or even annuals.

Compost also retains moisture, the other key ingredient for healthy lawns and gardens. The most effective way to water is several (2-3) hours in the morning, several (2-3) times a week. So, make sure your sprinkler system operates that way. Soaker hoses or drip systems are, in fact, even better than sprinklers. They simulate a long gentle rain directly to the roots, easily turned on or off as the weather dictates - you have the control!

There are so many quality organic products available now that there is no reason not to use them. (I can personally recommend Coast of Maine products available at reputable nurseries.) If you hire help, you have the right to ask what kinds of products they are using near your home, pets, and children. If you want to do more research on your own, I have found that “safelawns.org” is an excellent resource.

I don’t think we’ve intentionally gotten off track, but now it’s so simple to make these important changes. Replacing chemicals with an option like organic compost is more cost effective and environmentally friendly and as a result, our gardens will be healthier, more beautiful, and will become once again a place for relaxation and play.

The column is reprinted from last year.



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